

# The Retrieval of the Mayaguez

**T**WO KINDS OF SATISFACTION are being taken from the retrieval of the Mayaguez by American marines and from the return of the merchant ship's 40 crew members by their Cambodian captors. The first kind is, of course, relief that the men and their ship got out safely. Those 40 men were in danger throughout their ordeal, and no one could be sure that they would survive either their capture by the Cambodians on Monday, or their confinement if it had continued, or the American effort to rescue them. It was a bold decision President Ford took to go after them. Given the results, it was also on balance a successful one, despite the military casualties. And given the silence the Cambodians had apparently maintained until then, he may have had very little choice. By the time the Cambodians announced they were willing to return the ship and also (the context of the announcement makes clear) the crew, military action had already begun and it would have been extremely difficult if not impossible to halt it.

There will be time enough to scan the record of the diplomatic initiatives attempted beforehand by the administration and to see what if any substance there may be to the Cambodian claim that the Mayaguez was merely the latest of a series of "provocative" foreign ships to sail through its territorial waters. For now we can all be grateful that the ship and its crew are back on the undisputed high seas.

The second kind of satisfaction being taken from the Mayaguez affair is, however, of an entirely different sort. We refer to the positively manic glee with which the incident has been seized on by the administration and its supporters as proof that the international position of the United States, not to speak of its self-esteem, have been somehow magically restored after the collapse of this country's 30-year effort to contain the advance of insurgency in Indochina.

Listen to Vice President Nelson Rockefeller: "I'm very proud to be an American today." And Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger: ". . . a firm and measured response to the high-handed and crude use of force. To countenance such an act would mean the weakening of

international order and civilized communications." And Sen. Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.): if Mr. Ford had not sent in troops, "every little half-assed nation is going to take shots at us." HEW Secretary Caspar Weinberger: "I'm glad to have something to be proud of again." Sen. John Tower (R-Tex.): "In the eyes of the world this enhances confidence in the United States to react and react expeditiously." Sen. Carl Curtis (R-Neb.): "The courageous and decisive action by President Ford will do more for the cause of liberty around the world than all of the diplomatic meetings and conferences that have been held in the last few years and will be held in the next five years." Rep. Carroll Hubbard (D-Ky.): "Had we shown some fortitude such as this during the past 10 years, we could have easily won the war in Vietnam and avoided the embarrassment of the Pueblo hijacking."

We have no objection to the Ford administration's milking this incident for its political value: that's normal politics. But the substance of most of these and other supportive comments adds up to a measure of jingoistic claptrap beyond all reason. It is nothing short of alarming that one rather small incident in which the greatest power in the world used force against a country describing itself as "small, poor and needy"—an isolated and friendless country at that—could be such a tonic to official Washington. That anyone could find the Mayaguez affair a valid or meaningful guide to the requirements of post-Vietnam foreign policy at other times and places defies common sense. Responsible people ought not to be magnifying this affair and casting it as a useful precedent for whatever ails America in the wake of Vietnam. They ought to be pointing out that every other problem of policy is harder and more delicate and not open to the kind of quick military fix which, fortunately, worked in this case.

The United States has not suddenly reinstated itself as a full-fledged four-star operative world power capable of commanding the respect and confidence of big and little powers alike. It has only enjoyed a brief interlude of high, and happily successful, adventure before returning, as it must, to the real world.